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SUBJECT: PRT TIKRIT: SHEIKH'S KIDNAPPING DEMONSTRATES  
SHIFT IN AQIZ TARGETING IN SALAH AD DIN

Classified By: Stephanie Miley, PRT Team Leader, for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) This is a PRT Tikrit, Salah ad Din cable.

[1](#)2. (S/NF) SUMMARY. The January 8 kidnapping of Sheikh Ahmad "Naji" Hussein Ajbarah al Jabouri, head of the Salah ad Din (SaD) Sheikhs Council, represents what could be a significant shift in al Qaeda (AQIZ) targeting toward legitimate provincial government and tribal institutions in the province. The targeting shift appears to coincide with the AQIZ-affiliated Mujahidin Shuria Council's (MSC) mid-October 2006 declaration of the "Islamic State of Iraq" (ISI). For Sheikh Naji's safe return, AQIZ has demanded political support from the powerful and politically savvy Ajbarah al Jabouri tribe, which includes the Deputy Governor, in what appears to be an attempt to co-opt provincial government and tribal officials into legitimizing AQIZ's establishment of an Islamic state. At the same time, AQIZ has been working to validate their role in the community on the village level. Other reporting indicates the gap between AQIZ and Sunni insurgent organizations in the province may be widening, with previous marriages of convenience breaking down in recognition of the two very different end states desired. AQIZ's entrance into the provincial political arena in Salah ad Din appears to be maladroitness and may prove to be a serious misstep. The Ajbarah al Jabouri tribe is formidable, and it has the potential to turn large portions of the province's population against AQIZ, especially in light of other insurgent groups' growing reluctance to work with AQIZ. END SUMMARY.

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Kidnapping the Province's Highest Tribal Authority  
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[1](#)3. (S) While returning from the hajj, Sheikh Ahmad "Naji" Hussein Ajbarah al Jabouri was kidnapped on January 8 south of Samarra city. According to eye witnesses and younger brother SaD Deputy Governor Abdullah Ajbarah, Sheikh Naji was abducted by three known AQIZ operatives who are based in the al Duluyiah area of the province. According to a close PRT contact with direct access, several local Sunni insurgent groups stopped by Sheikh Naji's home in the al Alam suburb of Tikrit on January 13 to indicate they were not involved in the kidnapping and to express their condolences to tribal relatives. On the same day, seven AQIZ affiliates, announcing themselves as such, also presented themselves to indicate that they had kidnapped Sheikh Naji and that they were holding him. They said there was no ransom and that they were not interested in money. They wanted the family's "political support" for AQIZ. (NOTE: The Ajbarah Al Jabouri family is Salah ad

Din's most politically and tribally well-connected family. The Al Jabouri tribe is the leading tribe in Salah ad Din, and it has actively sought to establish political alliances with other tribes throughout the province. Notable members include Sheikh Naji who is head of the SaD Sheikhs Council, younger brother SaD Deputy Governor Abdullah who is the most powerful political figure in the province, and younger brother COL Jassim who is Director of the National Security Affairs' provincial office. END NOTE.) According to the PRT contact, the Ajbarah family said they would kill 15 known AQIZ Iraqi associates if harm came to Sheikh Naji, who spoke out against AQIZ operations in Iraq in a mid-December interview on Al Jazeera pan Arab news station.

¶4. (S) In addition to Sheikh Naji's kidnapping, several other provincial government officials, many of whom are actively engaging in the political process and who are largely pro-Coalition Forces, have received threats or been kidnapped.

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Shift in AQIZ's Targeting  
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¶5. (S) Targeting provincial government and tribal officials represents a significant shift in AQIZ's targeting in the province. Previously, AQIZ principally targeted the Coalition Forces (CF), the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), and the Shia in Balad. To build support in SaD's Sunni communities, AQIZ had initially attempted to cooperate with local tribal and political authorities. Sheikh Naji's kidnapping appears to be a decisive departure from this engagement policy, though AQIZ still conducts outreach campaigns in communities at the village level.

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The Islamic State of Iraq Demands Political Support  
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¶6. (S/NF) The change seems to have begun after the October 15, 2006 declaration of the "Islamic State of Iraq" (ISI) by the AQIZ-affiliated Mujahidin Sharia Council (MSC). AQIZ's demand for political support from the Ajbarah al Jabouri tribe appears to be an attempt to co-opt provincial government and tribal officials into legitimizing their establishment of an Islamic state. Additionally, kidnapping Sheikh Naji, the province's highest tribal authority, demonstrates intimidation-based command and control tactics to the rest of the province's traditional and government officials, likely in the hopes that if successful, other provincial leaders will fall in line behind the Ajbarah al Jabouri's.

¶7. (S) At the same time, AQIZ has been working to legitimize their role on the community level. "Claims boxes" have been placed throughout the AQIZ stronghold of Duluyiah, where citizens write in problems and concerns so AQIZ can address them. AQIZ efforts to foment sectarian violence in the southern portion of the province near the Shia enclave of Balad have also resulted in some Sunni communities becoming more open to an AQIZ presence in order to protect residents from a (largely illusory) perceived threat of growing Shia militias.

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AQIZ Alone in the Sandbox  
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¶8. (S) Other reporting indicates the gap between AQIZ and Sunni insurgent organizations may be widening, with previous marriages of convenience breaking down in recognition of the two very different end states desired. Some previously unaligned Sunni insurgent groups have also agreed to work together in order to diminish the role of

AQIZ and prevent establishment of a true Islamic State.

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Comment  
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¶9. (S) AQIZ's entrance into the provincial political arena in Salah ad Din appears to be maladroit and may prove to be a serious misstep. AQIZ's decision to target legitimate government officials in order to undermine their effectiveness, eliminate competitors, and co-opt support for the AQIZ-proposed end state makes sense. And kidnapping Sheikh Naji and politically manipulating the Ajbarah al Jabouri tribe seems like a natural entree in to the province's political and tribal structures. However, the Ajbarah al Jabouri tribe is formidable, and it has the potential to turn large portions of the province's population against AQIZ, especially in light of other insurgent groups' recent realization that AQIZ promotes a very different end state than the secular insurgents are pursuing.

¶10. (S) While no single narrative explains the relationship between legitimate provincial institutions, AQIZ, and Sunni insurgent organizations, it does appear that AQIZ's push for an extremist end state and its use of terror tactics are isolating it from some legitimate Iraqi institutions and insurgent groups. AQIZ will continue efforts to launch attacks on the CF and to thwart USG engagement with the provincial leadership. It remains to be seen how this episode will affect the provincial government's current positive cooperation with CF and the average citizen's view of and support for the provincial government and its leaders. END COMMENT.

¶11. (U) For additional reporting from PRT Tikrit, Salah ad Din, please see our SIPRNET Reporting Blog:  
<http://www.intelink.sgov.gov/wiki/Tikrit>.  
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